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BOOK REVIEWS

The Dynamics of a Rural Society—A Study of the Economic Structure in Bengal Villages, Ramkrishna Mukherjee, Akademik-Verlag-Berlin, 1957. Pp. x+134. D.M. 12.50.

This remarkably well-organised book is a lucid analysis of the impact of the economic structure on the dynamics of a society—for that matter a peasant society. It is supposed to be an answer to all those who assert that economic structure of a peasant society does not lend itself to the niceties of analysis, like that of an industrial society. Professor Mukherjee has accomplished his aim successfully.

The book has for its frame of reference Bengal villages—though no particular village is selected for intensive investigation. The author has made liberal use of charts and tables to illustrate his material. The value of the book is enhanced by the footnotes which contain references to documents—ancient and modern. It includes a comprehensive Bibliography, as an additional attraction.

The book is divided into two chapters. In the first three sections of the first chapter, Prof. Mukherjee with the aids of diagrams and tables, justifies his approach of limiting the analysis to only three classes which he delineates by permutation and combination of many groups. These three classes are computed in terms of production-relations and their inter-action with the caste-structure is examined. As the author observes "This means that the economic structure must reflect the way in which the means of production are owned and revealed the social relations between men which have resulted from their connections with the process of production" p. 12. How unsatisfactory this approach is, would be obvious if one realizes that the writer arrives first at these three classes and then shows how these fit into caste hierarchy—the members of the upper castes making up class one, while the members of the lower castes crowding in the third.

It is the writer's contention that in the pre-British days in the rural areas production-relation was "represented by self-sufficient, self-working and self-sufficient cultivators." Accent was not on ownership of land, but on possession and it was the village community that remained the focus of all relationships—external and internal. This particular structure did not give any scope for any other type of relations and caste structure did not disturb its static equilibrium. "It is thus seen that because of the village community system and the absence of distinct property rights over land, the peasants possessed it and used it for subsistence production, while their surplus labour was enjoyed through taxes and tributes by the feudal hierarchy..." p. 26.

Evidently, what Prof. Mukherjee wants to underscore is that during the pre-British days the relations-of-production and forces of production were in equilibrium and therefore there was no exploitation and even if there was exploitation it was not on the basis of private ownership right in land. It was only after the arrival of the British that the caste system showed its Hydraheaded form and peasantry lost its means of livelihood and manned the army of the landless labourers. To Prof. Mukherjee, all that has happened seems so well-organized, that one wonders how it all came about. It is true that the British took the ma-

ximum advantage of social confusion and they instituted 'vested interests' to stabilize their power. But this is not peculiar to the British rulers—all rulers sail in the same boat. The time is passed to lay blame on the foreign rulers for all our misfortunes and create scapegoats to explain our inability to act.

As to the idyllic village community, the earlier eulogies of Metcalfe, Maine and Marx have been shown to lack substantiation in facts by the findings of sociological and social anthropological field research. It is true, that the concept as an 'ideal type' stands, but the processes of 'universalization' and what Dr. Srinivas calls Sanskritization have broken the complete isolation at many strategic points. In a recent article in the *Economic Weekly* (Vol. XII, No. 37, September 10, 1960) Dr. Srinivas and Shri A. M. Shah have affirmed "that while roads were very poorly developed, while monetization of the rural economy was minimal and while the locally dominant caste could lay down the law on many matter, the village was always a part of a wider economic, political and religious system." Regarding the other two aspects (self-possessing and self-working), one may hazard a query "was there any escape?" The writer himself has quoted Marx and the reviewer takes liberty to quote what seems to her relevant. "The question is, can mankind fulfil its destiny without a fundamental revolution in the social state of Asia? If not, whatever may have been the crime of England, she was the unconscious tool of history in bringing about that Revolution." Foot note on page 74.

The economic structure that emerged after the introduction of the Permanent settlement and the Zamindari system could not by any stretch of imagination be said to be just, but it rounded the vicious circle, it did not initiate it.

In the second chapter, Prof. Mukherjee has another spanner to throw. According to him the caste system was on the way to dissolution when the British codified the Hindu law and gave a sanction to different customs and practices. So the economic structure with the concomitant social organisation effectively deprived masses of their customary rights.

Further the merchants and traders lost their sphere of influence as the East India Company extended its trading activities. Mr. Mukherjee seems to suggest that indigenous traders and merchants were the agents of new order and Britishers thwarted their attempts by depriving them of their legitimate claims.

Let there be no misunderstanding. The reviewer does not object to the inclusion of economic structures in the explanation of social dynamics. One would go a step further—economic activities are powerful and penetrating. But they are not total or sufficient explanation of social change. Social change eludes us. Its manifestations are formidable, its repercussions are far reaching. May be Parsons is too cautious when he writes "*a general theory of the process of change of social systems is not possible in the present state of knowledge*" (Italics by the author. *Social Systems*, Talcot Parsons, Tavistock Publications Ltd., p. 486), but his remarks are pertinent.

Prof. Mukherjee's book cannot be said to be a complete discussion of social dynamics. It is a one-sided approach. The truth is, the economic structure

cannot be understood without studying its social background. The resilience of caste is a well-observed fact. Even in the 20th century, the directed economic change falters in the face of social rigidities. The accent should, therefore, be neither on the economic structure, nor on the social institutions, but on unravelling their inter-relations in all fields.

(MRS.) HEMALATA ACHARYA

The Collectivization of Agriculture in Eastern Europe, Edited by I. T. Sanders, University of Kentucky Press, 1958. Pp. x+214. \$ 5.00.

The publication is the collection of papers contributed by eminent experts and served as basis for discussion at the Conference held at the Kentucky University. The deliberations of the Conference and the seminars have been very ably summed up by contributions on various socio-economic topics prepared by the editor and other specialists in their respective fields. The Conference and the seminars in which some of the sessions were divided were attended by American scholars and specialists in Eastern European Agriculture. A number of these specialists were former government officials in the pre-communist days. Some of the participants were rural social scientists.

Literature on the collectivized agriculture of the world is scanty and scattered and presented to the outside world in a manner that conceals more than it reveals the state of affairs. A number of research institutions in Europe and elsewhere with the help of eminent workers in exile ceaselessly strive to bring the true picture of the collectivist world to the free countries. It is the experts who are acquainted not only with the problems but the processing of data specially for presentation to the outside world who can enlighten the inquisitive with the correct picture of the economy and the measure of comparability of the material and superiority or otherwise of the economy in relation to conditions elsewhere. The book, therefore, is a valuable addition to almost complete absence of material on Eastern Europe since communism swept over the region, except that offered by the respective governments and the communist parties of these countries. What has unfortunately happened is that either because of the bitter experience of the workers or the purpose of the research assignments, these studies have often suffered in objectivity.

The chapter scheme ensures a comprehensive account of the agrarian economic and social conditions in Eastern Europe as well as the various shades as they obtain in different countries of the region. Eastern Europe carries the characteristics of a predominantly agricultural economy and suffers from the economic afflictions common to under-developed countries. The agricultural population constitutes 50 to 80 per cent of the total. Industrialization is meagre except in Czechoslovakia and one or two other countries. The holdings are small and despite reforms since 1920 the agrarian structure was feudal. The region is inhabited by ten nationalities. The peasantries are marked by their homogeneity, exclusiveness and extreme religious traits. The region, however, has been politically explosive and played a major part in world conflicts and power pulls during the last half a century or so. Economically and politically the area was eternally ripe for a revolution. The post-World War II conditions hastened

the pace when the Soviet Union outwitted the free world by completing its domination. A comprehensive article gives a full account of the recent developments in the Soviet Union and draws a comparative picture of Communism in Russia, China and Eastern Europe to bring out the uniformity in policies and their ruthlessness, motivated by the anxiety to make the system over the entire collectivist region fool-proof to allow no room for outside influence. These general contributions are followed by detailed and analytical accounts of progress and conditions in some important countries of Eastern Europe. The papers together succeed in satisfying the reader's curiosity and thirst for knowledge and understanding of the conditions and problems of Eastern Europe. They also furnish a complete account of the variations in the policies both as between the various countries as well as in comparison with Russia and the causes that contributed to the differences. 'Collectivization has covered only 6 to 50 per cent of the total lands in different countries. In a large measure, but more particularly in Yugoslavia institutionalization has not proceeded beyond creation of farms which resemble our service co-operatives or joint cultivation farming societies. The contribution of the book thus constitutes an advance on the available literature on the subject about Eastern Europe.

In the evaluation of the publication, however, it is desirable to reflect a little on a few points which appear to be rather obscure. Collectivization is the main plank in Soviet strategy to centralize power and extract an economic surplus. But collectivization of agriculture in Eastern Europe has not been as thorough as in Russia and the reasons advanced for the deviation in policy do not appear to be complementary. It has been said, for instance, that the peasant in Eastern Europe is highly attached to land in a setting of extreme land hunger. Any very rigorous introduction of collectivization would bring forth resistance and might undermine farm production. This has been explained as a main consideration for going slow or reversing the original policies. At another place it has been argued that Russian agriculture could not produce surpluses in adequate quantities for supply to the European satellites in the event of possible shortages there arising from ruthless collectivization. Hence the pace of the process of conversion of peasant holdings into collectives was either slowed down or the policy was materially revised. In a third context it has been argued that as the mechanism of compulsory deliveries was perfected under the Nazis the Communist Governments of these countries kept it up to ensure supplies of foodstuffs. This mitigated the urgency for collectivization and centralization in Eastern Europe. It has also been pointed out that collectivization was not given the supreme place in Eastern Europe it received in Russia and China because of the sizeable peasant investments in agriculture and outstanding production performances in a variety of spheres both of which would have been lost or partially suffered under communism. This somehow does not appear convincing in the face of a *per capita* annual agricultural income of about Rs. 285 in the region which is only slightly higher than that in India. The truth might lie somewhere in between. The peasant communities were politically powerful in Eastern Europe. Quite a few political parties in these countries carried rural complexion. They, therefore, constituted a source of political power and it was thought prudent to carry them along under any set-up including communism. Similarly, when ascribing the revision of Soviet agricultural policies under Khrushchev to the stagnation in Russian agriculture and crediting the increase in production to extension of cultivation to

virgin lands, no anticipation could possibly have been made of the likely Russian record grain harvest of 144 million tons in 1960. Even in the account of the liberal policy towards collectives adopted since 1958, not enough justice has been done to the relaxations in compulsory deliveries, liberal share or reward to the members of the collectives and the added importance of the homesteads and the volume of production and pattern of activities on them.

The bias in the treatment which the few illustrations bring out might be explained away as views of different authors. It may arise sometimes as a by-product of the effort to carry the argument through a measure of exaggerated presentation. It may also emerge from the political background of the writers and the canopy under which deliberations are held. There is no attempt made here to show that collectivization is in any way superior to peasant or co-operative farming or commercial agriculture. What is sought to be emphasised is that in learned discussions and contributions intended for the consumption by advanced students and researchers, it is always good to be scrupulously objective and try to carry the point on the merit of the question and the supporting data.

M. B. DESAI

Estate Capital—The Contribution of Landownership to Agricultural Finance, D. R. Denman, George Allen and Unwin, London. Pp. 218. 22 Sh. 6d.

This is a study based on four surveys conducted by the Department of Estate Management of Cambridge University during the years 1952-56. The term 'Estate Capital,' as used in this study, denotes the contribution of landownership to the capital requirements of agriculture as distinguished from other investment in land and buildings on which large scale agriculture rests. The author's main objective seems to be an assessment of the problems of the British rural landowners and the latter's contribution to the capital requirements of the country's agriculture.

The first three chapters of the book describe the essential characteristics of estate capital and define those features of its character which the evidence from the surveys illustrates. The subsequent ten chapters discuss the results of the investigation. In the last chapter which is also largely based on the evidence of the surveys, the author gives his own views of the problem of providing estate capital for agriculture.

Data pertaining to no less than 2,750 farms covering $5\frac{1}{2}$ million acres are skilfully used and intelligently analysed in the various chapters to highlight factors which influence growth of estate capital, to review its formation from estate incomes, to find out the usual sources of capital funds utilised by the estates and to measure the level of these investments in estates under different size groups and varying conditions. Some of these chapters deserve special mention. Chapter seven, for instance, discusses factors such as alternative sources of remunerative investment, landowner's inclination to spread the risk of failure over more than one enterprise, a set-back in capital formation, tenurial and tenancy problems, uneconomic layout of the holdings, unhealthy land taxation policy, etc., which restrain the flow of capital to estate improvements. The subsequent chapter

shows how inducement to land ownership, a rational land-tax system, security of inheritance and such other factors aid the growth of estate capital.

In chapters ten and eleven, the results of the surveys are analysed from another angle. The main character-traits of estates are classified into two main groups viz. "physical" which include size, shape, structure, holdings pattern, and, "abstract" which include tenurial pattern, duration, ownership-personality, taxability, etc. These traits are also classified into primary and secondary ; structure, holdings pattern and tenurial pattern fall in the former and the rest in the latter category. In these two chapters, the author has analysed the evidence of the surveys so as to show these various traits influence revenue, income, external funds and other criteria of estate capital.

In the concluding chapter, the author combs through the preceding analysis and emphasises the need for capital investment in agriculture as distinguished from other capital invested in land and highlights common as well as particular trends influencing the flow of capital into agriculture ; finally, he points out some avenues to further investigation in this sphere of study.

Purely from the standpoint of India's agricultural economy, this study, based on a sample of "estates" averaging 2,000 acres in size and ruling out holdings below 100 acres, may not be of much practical help in throwing light on problems of capital for our agriculture, particularly when 30 acres has been broadly accepted as the upper limit for our holdings pattern. However, the various theses built up in this study pertaining to investment in agriculture, capital formation and allied issues make the study more or less of universal value by presenting the approach to such a study in a clear and scientific perspective for the benefit of all interested in this subject.

B. S. MAVINKURVE

Agricultural Co-operation (Selected Readings), Edited by Martin A. Abrahamsen and Claud L. Scroggs, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1957. Pp. xiv+576. \$ 7.50.

Any one interested in the progress and philosophy of agricultural co-operation in the U.S.A. will find no other book more useful than this. This book is a selection of fifty-four most significant articles, written at different times by forty-nine authors having intimate knowledge of the working of farm co-operatives as they have developed from the earliest informal efforts to more recent achievements that include the various integrated business operations required by to-day's complicated farm operations. In the selection and rearrangement of these articles, the two editors have performed a strenuous task ; first by "shifting the articles of hundreds of writers and thousands of pages of material" scattered in various publications and then by rearranging them under different heads in a manner that may bring together divergent ideas and various points of view for easier consideration and evaluation. This volume which has been prepared in response to the growing interest in agricultural co-operation will, no doubt, prove to be of inestimable value to all those who are interested in co-operative literature.

To understand the nature of the "ten-billion dollar farmer co-operative business," the editors think that it is necessary to know something about their history and the philosophy that have contributed to their distinctive features ; pinpoint the way in which they fit into the present-day economy and critically appraise their contribution to the economic and social welfare of the farm community. With this objective in view, they have divided the volume in three parts, *viz*, I. The emergence of the co-operative institutions, II. Co-operatives in the modern economy and III. Evaluation and appraisal.

The first part explains at length how the farmer of the U.S.A. beset with the problems of marketing his surplus produce, has been continuously in search of a marketing agency that may efficiently market his produce and also bring him higher monetary returns. The record of co-operatives in performing this useful function has been quite satisfactory. In 1953-54, for instance, 77.5 per cent of the net business of farm co-operatives was confined only to marketing of farm produce ; the remaining being shared by various farm-supply services. Informed by a high degree of business efficiency and sense of social purpose, farm co-operatives are destined to play increasingly significant role in the sphere of marketing and processing of agricultural produce. From time to time, attempts have been made to interpret the development of co-operation from various angles : economic, sociological, philosophical and even spiritual. In spite of the differences in approach, these interpretations have certain things in common. All of them recognise that co-operatives have become an integral part of the free-enterprise economy, that they are means of complementing and strengthening the capitalistic economy at its weakest points and thus perform a positive role in the economy by aiding it to achieve a better allocation of resources, highest total production and a wider distribution of income. As they have been primarily taken as economic agencies, there is a keen desire to maintain a very high degree of efficiency. In the fast changing economic environment the need for flexibility has always been recognised and the co-operative leaders have shown great foresight in willingly reappraising continuously the various principles associated with the organization and working of co-operative enterprises. In the face of declining market, farm co-operatives maintain a healthy growth, sound financial conditions, and high degree of efficiency in operations. In the section entitled "Suggested Theoretical Explanations" attempts are made to explore the possibility of evolving a theory of co-operation with the help of the theory of firm. But these attempts are not very fruitful and in the opinion of the editors a meaningful theory is yet to be developed.

The second part discusses problems which are useful mostly to the workers in the co-operative field. After a comprehensive analysis of major developments in the co-operative policy made by one of the editors, we are further given the details of important legislative bench marks and judicial decisions. The chapter entitled "Co-operative Relations : Conflicts and Harmonies" seeks to answer the crucial question facing the co-operative movement all over the world, *viz*, how far co-operative democracy is compatible with business success ? It seems that this double objective has proved almost impossible of achievement ; and a co-operative is usually considered to be a better kind of private business only. In recent years the expansion of co-operative business is mostly the result of a movement towards integration, both vertical and horizontal. A framework for such integration and its actual process has been described at length.

In the third part, many questions of wider significance have been discussed. They include, for example, the place of the co-operatives in American agriculture and her national economy, the contribution of the co-operatives to the institution of family farms, and their desirability in the free-enterprise economy as a middle way. The business performance of marketing and purchasing co-operatives has been subjected to very severe critical appraisal so that in future mistakes may be avoided. Future problems have been posed, the role of research is emphasised and certain necessary changes have been outlined for the smooth and systematic future development of co-operatives.

This volume, though primarily addressed to the American readers, contains discussions on many problems which are vital to the co-operative movement elsewhere. A careful perusal, will enable its reader to draw many useful lessons.

A. C. SHAH